

dangerously ill person is fairly obvious. Similarly, under Article 378 of the Code it is a crime, except in certain defined situations, for a doctor to disclose confidential information acquired during the course of his work. Other criminal liabilities examined include those which can arise from the practices of organ transplants, human experimentation, and abortion.

Part 2 of the book is given to discussing new aspects of medical liability which have resulted from the fact that the performance of the medical act has tended increasingly to become a collective activity – unlike days gone by when it tended more often to be effected by an individual doctor. This collective activity is epitomized today in the hospital surgical team where surgeon, anaesthetist, and others work conjointly in treating the patient. What are the liabilities of the surgical team to the patient? If the anaesthetist makes a mistake during the operation, is he personally liable to the patient therefore? Or is the surgeon, as head of the team, accountable for his anaesthetist's mistake? Or are they collectively liable? The author analyses such questions and, at the same time, discusses whether the traditional solutions to problems of medical liability may have to be reconsidered and amended to accommodate these situations where the medical act is collective rather than individual in nature.

All in all, this is an eminently readable book. However, because of the peculiarities of French law, it will not be of great practical assistance to the British doctor or lawyer.

DAVID LESSELS

Birth

A film produced and directed by Helen Brew with a commentary by Dr R D Laing.

16mm, colour with combined optical sound track. Distributed by Concord Films Council Ltd, Ipswich, 1977.

Childbearing today is safer than ever before, and so why do we hear so much complaint and criticism about obstetric services from those being cared for? This film explains why people are dissatisfied with modern obstetric care. The film tells us that women having babies are being treated in a uniform and insensitive manner so that they lose their identity, are treated like children rather than adults, and are deprived of the peaks of experience that contribute so much to the creation of new relationships. As birth creates at least three new relationships – between mother and child, between father and child and between mother and father – disruptive influences at this time are especially serious in their effects and to be deplored.

Even if obstetricians and midwives are correct in all their modern practices, even if the film were wrong to ask the questions that it does, and even if the film is regarded as emotive and biased, at the very least it demonstrates the gap in understanding between the professionals and childbearing people. When lay people ask questions, the response of the profession is too often defensive. But, how are people to understand, if they cannot ask questions or get them answered? If those seeking information can neither get nor understand the answers, who is to blame? Dr Laing's commentary to the film asks many questions of obstetricians and midwives, which

in my opinion are entirely valid and demand answers.

I find the film beautiful and moving, because it allows women to speak for themselves and especially with their eyes and faces. Those who criticise the production of the film do so in defence of their own attitudes thereby revealing them for what they are. If the sound-track magnifies the harsh and strident noises of modern obstetric care, if the pictures emphasise the indignity of obstetric procedures, is this not how they seem to the woman giving birth? In which case, the sights and sounds presented represent truth and should make us more sensitive.

When the London Medical Group showed this film, it attracted one of the largest audiences that it has ever had for an evening meeting. The film had to be shown a second time for the sake of those waiting outside. The discussion that followed the film showed how it successfully provoked and challenged those present. But, it is sad that apart from myself, I did not recognise a single obstetrician in the audience. Perhaps it is too provocative and challenging? Fortunately, medical students, others like nurses and physiotherapists, and more important still women and men having babies have not ignored the film.

If people continue to ask questions, perhaps some day obstetricians and midwives will question themselves rather than ignore the problems, or persist in defending what they are doing with inadequate paternalistic answers.

PETER J HUNTINGFORD